

Ajahn Chah's Wisdom

by *Binh Anson*

Ajahn Chah belong to the forest tradition re-established in Thailand in the beginning of this century, by Luang Pu Waen and then Ajahn Mun (who was the teacher of Ajahn Chah). They followed strict monastic rules (the Vinaya, Gio⁺i Lua[^].t), lived mostly by themselves in the forest for intensive meditation. They also practiced the tradition of Dutangha (Du Ta^(ng)), going from one place to another on foot in several months of the year. Ajahn Mun had trained many famous meditation monks - some still alive, some died recently: Ajahn Chah, Buddhadasa Bikkhu, Ajahn Maha Buawa (still alive), Ajahn Thaet, Ajahn Pannananda (still alive), ... The Thai word "Ajahn" (A-cha[^]n) - from the Pali "Acarya" - means master, teacher (Tha[^]y).

Ajahn Chah died a few years ago, but he had many branch monasteries in Thailand as well as in England, Australia and New Zealand. The overseas monasteries and meditation centres are run by his Western disciples (including the one in Perth).

Ajahn Chah's talks were compiled into many books and translated into English by his Western disciples. They are reprinted many times for free distribution. Buddhist groups in Thailand, Malaysia and Taiwan are very active in distributing his books. If you contact your local Theravada group, there is a good chance that you can get one for free!

One of Ajahn Chah's books, "The Still Forest Pond", has been translated into Vietnamese with title "Ma(t Ho[^] Ti~nh La^(ng)" by Bikkhu Aggasami (Su⁺ Tra[^]n Minh Ta[^]i), of the Tathagata Meditation Centre (Nhu⁺ Lai Thie[^]n Vie[^].n) in San Jose. It's a very good book which I recommend to all of you. You can get a free copy from:

Tathagata Meditation Center
1215 Lucretia Avenue
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Below are some of his words of wisdom, taken from the book "No Ajahn Chah":

1. Once there was a layman who came to Ajahn Chah and asked him who Ajahn Chah was. Ajahn Chah, seeing that the spiritual development of the individual was not very advanced, pointed to himself and said, "This, this is Ajahn Chah."

On another occasion, Ajahn Chah was asked the same question by someone else. This time, however, seeing that the questioner's capacity to understand the Dhamma was higher, Ajahn Chah answered by saying: "Ajahn Chah ? There is NO Ajahn Chah !"

2. A visiting Zen student asked Ajahn Chah, "How old are you? Do you live here all year round?" "I live nowhere," he replied. "There is no place you can find me. I have no age. To have age, you must exist, and to think you exist is already a problem. Don't make problems; then the world has none either. Don't make a self. There's nothing more to say."

3. Why are we born ? We are born so that we will not have to be born again.

4. You say that you are too busy to meditate. Do you have time to breathe ? Meditation is your breath. Why do you have time to breathe but not to meditate ? Breathing is something vital to people's lives. If you see that Dhamma practice is vital to your life, then you will feel that breathing and practicing the Dhamma are equally important.

5. What is Dhamma ? Nothing isn't.

6. First you understand the Dhamma with your thoughts. If you begin to understand it, you will practice it. And if you practice it, you will begin to see it. And when you see it, you are the Dhamma, and you have the joy of the Buddha.

7. Only one book is worth reading: the heart.

8. If you want to wait around to meet the future Buddha, then just don't practice (the Dhamma). You'll probably be around long enough to see him when he comes.
9. We don't meditate to see heaven, but to end suffering.
10. Whatever we do, we should see ourselves. Reading books doesn't ever give rise to anything. The days pass by, but we don't see ourselves. Knowing about practice is practicing in order to know.
11. Remember you don't meditate to "get" anything, but to get "rid" of things. We do it, not with desire, but with letting go. If you "want" anything, you won't find it.
12. If you have time to be mindful, you have time to meditate.
13. Looking for peace is like looking for a turtle with mustache. You won't be able to find it. But when your heart is ready, peace will come looking for you.
14. Do not be a bodhisatta; do not be an arahant; do not be anything at all. If you are a bodhisatta, you will suffer; if you are an arahant, you will suffer; if you are anything at all, you will suffer.
15. A woman wanted to know how to deal with anger. I asked when anger arose whose anger it was. She said it was hers. Well, if it really was her anger, then she should be able to tell it to go away, shouldn't she? But it really isn't hers to command. Holding on to anger as a personal possession will cause suffering. If anger really belonged to us, it would have to obey us. If it doesn't obey us, that means it's only a deception. Don't fall for it. Whenever the mind is happy or sad, don't fall for it. It's all a deception.
16. You are your own teacher. Looking for teachers can't solve your own doubts. Investigate yourself to find the truth - inside, not outside. Knowing yourself is most important.
17. A madman and an arahant both smile, but the arahant knows why while the madman doesn't.
18. Outward scriptural study is not important. Of course, the Dhamma books are correct, but they are not right. They cannot give you right understanding. To see the word "anger" in print is not the same as experiencing anger. Only experiencing yourself can give you the true faith.
19. These days people don't search for the Truth. People study simply in order to find knowledge necessary to make a living, raise families and look after themselves, that's all. To them, being smart is more important than being wise!
20. Once a visitor asked Ajahn Chah if he was an arahant. He said, "I am like a tree in a forest. Birds come to the tree, they sit on its branches and eat its fruits. To the birds, the fruit may be sweet or sour or whatever. The birds say sweet or they say sour, but from the tree's point of view, this is just the chattering of birds."
21. Someone commented, "I can observe desire and aversion in my mind, but it's hard to observe delusion." "You're riding on a horse and asking where the horse is !" was Ajahn Chah's reply.
22. If it isn't good, let it die. If it doesn't die, make it good.

(From: "No Ajahn Chah - Reflections", Dhamma Garden, 1994.)

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